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112020Z Apr 05

UNCLAS CARACAS 001049

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SUBJECT: NDI AND IRI WORK TO STRENGTHEN POLITICAL PARTIES
IN VENEZUELA

SUMMARY

¶1. The National Democratic Institute (NDI) and the International Republican Institute (IRI) are in a strong position to facilitate the renovation/transformation of

Venezuela's political parties, building on the Qationships developed with party membership over the past year, and the institutional knowledge resulting from these relationships. They are working with (primarily) opposition parties to help them focus on their survival as relevant political institutions through a process of party renovation and strengthening. End Summary.

POLITICAL PARTY STRENGTHENING

¶2. Recent history and the intense electoral cycle of the past year have left the opposition parties in a debilitated state. Coming out of this cycle, opposition political parties are beginning to accept - to varying degrees - that there is no returning to the past; that President Hugo Chavez and his supporters are forces to be reckoned with for the foreseeable future; and that to play a serious role in Venezuelan politics - or even to continue to exist as political parties - they must work on the painfully difficult task of re-inventing themselves, increasing their capacity, and positioning themselves for the future.

What's NDI Up To?

¶3. In January, 2005, NDI began implementation of a year-long, \$500,000 project focusing on party transformation. While NDI's work of 2004 focused primarily on providing tactical advice as events unfolded, this year NDI's emphasis is longer-term and focused on profound change. NDI's assessment is that while there is resistance by some party members fearing that transformation will decrease their position within the party, the will exists at all levels, including relevant sectors of society, to move forward. Of primary importance will be the mobilization and engagement of reformist forces (e.g. young leaders, women, civil society) so that necessary change does indeed occur despite the reluctance of some party leaders.

¶4. In collaboration with party stake-holders, NDI's in-country staff are working to identify key issues related to party reform. Experienced trainers/political consultants will then lead party membership through the necessary steps to achieve specific objectives. Facilitating the development of strategies and messages that address the aspirations of low-income voters is a high priority. (Note: Chavez opponents made an attempt to reach out to this critical bloc just prior to the referendum but did not succeed.)

¶5. Another component of NDI's strategy is to animate the process of party renovation through rebuilding / strengthening ties between affiliated political blocs in Europe and Venezuela, primarily the Christian Democrats and the Social Democrats. As an example, NDI recently sponsored a visit by Elena Flores, the Latin American Director for the Pablo Iglesias Foundation of the Spanish Workers' Socialist Party. Ms. Flores visited three regional workshops organized by AD whose purpose was to discuss future training plans and party membership. NDI reported that the response by attendees to Ms. Flores motivational discourse was overwhelmingly positive - occasionally tearful - in large part because of her affiliation with the European Social Democratic movement and the sense given to AD membership that they had not been forgotten by their European counterparts.

¶6. AD warrants serious attention given its still relatively intact (albeit severely battered) institutional infrastructure, their history of outreach to the less-privileged sectors of the country, their control of the majority of professional organizations, their strong presence at numerous universities and the fact that they accounted for the largest percentage of the opposition vote in the October 31 regional elections.

¶7. NDI is in the process of finalizing a training proposal

with AD leadership which will focus on party organization and political values - such as internal democratization - as a move to reinvigorate AD's once robust but now moribund training program. The proposal is partially based on an internal evaluation facilitated by the German organization Friederich Ebert, and includes input from Elena Flores and Guillermo Galeote. (Note: Galeote, also with the Fundacion Pablo Iglesias, has many years experience working in party transformation and serves as the NDI point person working with AD.) Ms. Flores sees value in providing a forum for much-needed discussions among the rank-and-file regarding the future of the party, especially party leadership - public discussions that quite possibly would not take place otherwise. AD's recently appointed training director and 25 Regional Training Coordinators will participate in a training-of-trainers workshop scheduled for late April, which will include participation by Galeote.

18. COPEI, once Venezuela's second largest party, continues its decline, abetted by intra-party rivalries over leadership. In late 2004, an NDI consultant spent a week working with party membership to begin a process of party restructuring - a process that has since been put on hold due to COPEI's internal problems. NDI has informed COPEI leadership that a condition for future collaboration is that COPEI link with other Christian Democratic parties.

19. NDI is in discussions with Primero Justicia regarding possible collaboration on modern techniques of message development and diffusion.

What's IRI Up To?

10. IRI began the second phase of its program of campaign schools in January, 2005, with the signing of a second cooperative agreement for \$500,000. In the lead-up to the municipal council elections in early August and the parliamentary elections in December, IRI is conducting campaign schools throughout the country, including the states which were not included in the first year's activities: Amazonas (where a governorship is at stake), Sucre, and Falcon. (In March, IRI held a training in Falcon State for 250 members of AD and the Movimiento al Socialismo focusing on campaign structure and voter mobilization. Many candidates running in the August municipal council elections attended the training.)

11. Topics to be covered in the campaign schools include: campaign strategy and organization, message development (including working with focus groups), outreach (including public speaking), fund-raising, public relations, get-out-the-vote techniques, and candidate selection. This last will be partly based on a candidate survey to be carried out by IRI in April, complemented by a statistical study of the previous parliamentary elections being analyzed by NDI. Additional topics will be added as prioritized by participating political parties. Where appropriate and resource-permitting, workshops will be given on specific topics for individual parties (e.g. a recent workshop with members of Primero Justicia, focusing on how to carry out polls by phone).

12. In addition to the campaign schools, IRI will be bringing in consultants who specialize in party renovation to discuss case studies of political parties in Germany, Spain, and Canada which successfully carried out the process of party renovation.

13. Using funding from the National Endowment for Democracy, IRI continues its work with youth leadership in Miranda State. In March, a training was held in Pilas de Marriche, one of the largest barrios in Caracas, to promote grassroots organization and voter outreach among the urban poor. The training was attended by 40 representatives (of whom 36 were women) from 4 political parties along with representatives from independent local movements.

Gov Participation in the NDI and IRI Programs

14. While NDI continues to invite government-affiliated parties to participate in their activities, to date only the MVR-aligned Patria Para Todos (PPT) has agreed to sit down and talk with them. PPT leadership had expressed interest in working with NDI to establish relations with unspecified sectors of American society, and to have local party leadership in the states of Yaracuy and Guarico receive training in political administration. However, this possible collaboration has been put on hold, at the request of PPT. MVR participation in IRI activities continues to be minimal despite some efforts to reach out to the official sector.

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